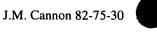


Claims:

- 1 1.\ A method of providing a visual message waiting indicator signal to an off-hook
- telephone, comprising the steps of:
- 3 receiving a voicemail message at a central location; and
- 4 sending a visual message waiting indicator signal from the central location and
- 5 destined for the off-hook telephone.
- 1 2. A method as recited in claim 1, wherein the step of sending the visual message
- waiting indicator signal includes the steps of:
- alerting the off-hook telephone to an upcoming transmission of the visual
- 4 message waiting indicator signal; and
- transmitting the visual message waiting indicator signal at a time period after the
- 6 alerting step.
- 1 3. A method as recited in claim 2, further comprising the step of receiving an
- acknowledgement signal relating to a status of the off-hook telephone as being ready to
- 3 receive the visual message waiting indicator signal prior to the transmitting step.
- 1 4. A method as recited in claim 3, wherein the time period of the transmitting step is
- 2 based on the acknowledgment signal.
- 1 5. A method as recited in claim 3, wherein the predetermined time is associated with
- a muting period of the off-hook telephone.

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- 1 \6. A method as recited in claim 1, wherein the step of sending includes transmitting
- 2 caller ID data associated with a party that left the voicemail message.
- 1 A method of receiving a visual message waiting indicator signal in an off-hook
- 2 telephone, comprising the steps of:
- 3 being in an off-hook condition; and
- 4 receiving a visual message waiting indicator signal.
- 8. A method as recited in claim 7, further comprising the step of displaying a visual
- 2 message waiting indicator based on the received visual message waiting indicator signal.
- 1 9. A method as reclted in claim 8, wherein the displaying step includes displaying
- 2 caller ID data associated with a messaging party.
- 1 10. A method as recited in claim 7, further comprising the step of receiving an alert
- signal, wherein the visual message waiting indicator signal is received at a time period
- 3 after the alert signal.
- 1 11. A method as recited in claim \0, further comprising the step of transmitting an
- 2 acknowledgement signal in response to the alert signal.
- 1 12. A method as recited in claim 11, wherein the time period is based on the
- 2 acknowledgement signal.



- A telephone, comprising: 1
- 2 a visual message waiting indicator; and
- 3 an interface unit adapted to couple the telephone to a network, such that the
- 4 telephone is in an off-hook condition when coupled to the network and engaged in a
- 5 communication activity, and is in an on-hook condition when coupled to the network and
- 6 not engaged in a communication activity,
- 7 wherein the interface unit is adapted to receive a visual message waiting indicator
- 8 signal when in the off-hook condition.
- A telephone as recited in claim 13, further comprising a muting mechanism 14. 1
- adapted to mute a transducer in association with the receipt of the visual message waiting 2
- 3 indicator signal.
- 15. A telephone as recited in claim 14, wherein the transducer comprises a 1
- 2 microphone.
- A telephone as recited in claim 14, wherein the transducer comprises a speaker. 1 16.
- 17. A telephone as recited in claim 14, wherein the muting mechanism is adapted to 1
- 2 mute the transducer in response td an alert signal.
- A telephone switch, comprising:



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- a message storage unit adapted to receive a voicemail message associated with a
- 3 telephone when the telephone is in an off-hook condition; and
- 4 \ a visual message waiting indicator signal transmission unit adapted to transmit a
- 5 visual message waiting indicator signal to the telephone in the off-hook condition.
- 1 19. A telephone switch as recited in claim 18, further comprising an alerting unit
- adapted to transmit an alerting signal to the telephone prior to transmitting the visual
- 3 message waiting indicator signal.
- 1 20. A telephone switch as recited in claim 19, further comprising an
- acknowledgement receiving unit adapted to receive an acknowledgement signal in
- response to the alerting signal and prior to transmitting the visual message waiting
- 4 indicator signal.